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Ethics of care across professional and everyday positionalities: The (un)expected impacts of participatory video with young female carers in Slovakia



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ABSTRACT

The paper offers a critical intervention into the debates on research impact, theorising the potential of underpinning research agendas by ethics of care. We explore how a range of vectors of care, both intimate and distant, emerged in collaborative activities between researchers based in the UK and community youth workers and teenage female carers in Slovakia, leading to a series of (un)expected outcomes. We argue that while all research impacts cannot be planned in advance, an ethics of care embedded in relationships within and beyond research settings may form conditions in which outcomes exceeding the initial expectations can be anticipated. To achieve this, we argue for questioning the distinctions between academic and non-academic collaborators, legitimising diverse forms of knowledge, action and impact in institutional policies, and for conceiving research projects from the beginning as “more-than-research” avenues.

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Introduction

The figure above is from a short video (attached to this paper) produced by two girls aged 13 and 14 from Kopčany, a small peripheral neighbourhood of Bratislava, Slovakia. The video was the outcome of an engagement between some of the authors, the girls and others in the neighbourhood. It documents the views of Hana and Elena¹ on the unsuitability of the neighbourhood's environment for children and young people as they reflect on their experiences as regular carers for other children from their extended families and friendship networks. The video still-shot captures the moment when one of Elena's young relatives throws a stone at an approaching truck just when her carer's attention lapses briefly. It illustrates the close proximity of the industrial landscape and traffic to children's everyday activities in Kopčany. It also exemplifies the apparent ordinariness of interactions between these children and their precarious environment, reinforcing the demand of the video's title “Kopčany: neighbourhood needs a playground”.

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¹ Names have been changed.

In this paper we reflect on how this specific example of participatory video² (PV) undertaken between young people and a team of practitioners and/or researchers both draws from and intervenes in the gendered patterns of (child)care among young people from urban Slovakia, which are in turn affected by post-socialist transformations of welfare, urban development and socio-demographics. By exploring not only the girls' accounts presented in the video but also the video's production and subsequent impact on the neighbourhood's environment and social relations, we extend our focus on care to incorporate the girls' direct caring practices as well as the relations between the girls, their community and those involved in the project. We interweave two settings of care: the experiences, practices and social relationships of young female carers from Slovakia in their neighbourhood; and the network of engagements between the girls, community youth workers and academics from abroad. Empirically we track how ethics of care materialise, embedded in research and community work practice and in the entanglements of connections between processes of intimate and distant caring that (in part) constitute these settings. Through this we develop a notion

² Participatory video itself, and its socio-technological aspects, are not the subject of this paper. However, [Blazek and Hraňová \(2012\)](#) discuss this in relation to another PV project in the same neighbourhood.

of impact that is constructed beyond a narrow “academia-to-users” vector.³ Our work commenced as a small community youth work project intended to provide a free-time activity to young teenagers over the summer vacation, but it evolved into a research process shedding light on patterns of care in a post-socialist urban periphery and on changes to the neighbourhood’s infrastructure, including a new playground funded by the local council. By attending to this genesis, our ultimate focus is on examining how an ethics of care can function as a foundational perspective for collaboration beyond academia and subsequently as a source and channel of unintended, organic and diverse impacts (Fuller and Askins, 2007). Thus an ethics of care frames the expectation of some kind of impacts, but is fundamentally open as to the specifics of the impacts – they are (un)expected. Later in the paper, we articulate this (un)certainly as a proposal for reframing the increasingly narrowly-defined criteria used for institutional evaluation of research impact (Taylor, 2014; Turner, 2014). We mirror this strategy also in our writing style: details about the project and its outcomes/impacts are presented gradually so the paper offers an experience to readers, which is similar to what we experienced in the project: an ongoing unfolding of events, relationships and consequences which matches and at the same time exceeds initial expectations.

Our analysis is situated within feminist perspectives on care. Care has been recognised as an important but commonly overlooked element of everyday lives, particularly in relation to socio-economic marginalisation and exclusion (Bowlby, 2011), but also through its emotional and power dynamics in lived experiences (Bondi, 2008). Research on care has widened understandings of agency, highlighting the importance of caring practices in the private sphere and how they are downplayed in dominant political and economic discourses (Haylett, 2003; Lawson, 2007). Focusing on care offers insights into geographies of the life-course, family and bonding (Bowlby et al., 2010) and underlines the importance of intergenerational relationships in everyday life strategies, particularly through the gendered organisation of care duties (McKie et al., 2004). Care also frequently underpins oppressive and restrictive structures of intimate relationships, both for those impacted by duties of caregiving and those who require and rely on care (Bondi, 2008).

Apart from being an object of study, care has also been argued to constitute an ethical foundation for social theory and research which points directly to the importance of connectivity and active collaboration (Held, 2007). In feminist geography, an emphasis on collective engagement with critical reflexivity has been translated into collaborative writing projects (WGSG, 1984, 1997; Laurie et al., 1999; Bondi et al., 2002) and in rich engagement with communities, activists and practitioners that entail outcomes and impacts beyond the textual (Townsend et al., 1995; Sharp, 2005; Johnston and Pratt, 2010; Pratt, 2010; Askins and Pain, 2011; Rodó-de-Zárate, 2014). In this regard, positionalities – and their relations – may be seen as an ‘instrument’ (England, 1994) that makes research possible, and they require attention. As we expand the notion of research beyond the processes of data collection in the field to encompass wider relationships that trigger the generation of impacts, we need also to explore how different positionalities enact different attitudes and practices of care

relevant to this project and which, we argue, make the (un)expected impacts of the project possible. We would argue that whereas there might be a discernible difference in the positionalities of researchers, practitioners and young carers if *research* is taken as the cornerstone of our activities, placing *care* at the centre of our analysis problematises some of these divisions, revises the architecture of field engagements, and fabricates new grounds for thinking about outcomes of academic/non-academic collaboration.

Our paper relates to both these contexts – of care as a focus of research and as a foundation for research praxis – and to their intersections as we narrate one community project where, through an ethics of care, commitment to collaboration, and reflexive critical practice through the platforms of PV and community youth work, a series of outcomes was produced centred around the experiences and wellbeing of young female carers in Slovakia. Outcomes included new knowledge about local care patterns, situated in the broader socio-economic context of post-socialist Slovakia, alongside informal educational activities and new social capital through community development. Research had an intricate role in this: on the one hand, it established the foundations for the overall collaboration, but on the other hand it was only one – rather unexpected and belated – element of the PV project itself. We argue that it was the ethics of care, coalesced around critically informed attention to the gendered patterns of child care in the deprived neighbourhood along with pooled professional expertise which fostered the outcomes, rather than a meticulously pre-written and subsequently accomplished plan of work. Advocating transgressions of neatly demarcated professional positions and roles, we suggest that commitment to collaboration beyond the academy and to an ethics of care has a strong potential to nurture unforeseen impacts and developments but also long-term relationships and further capacities among academic, professional and residential communities. The entangled on-going relations of research-practice-collaboration around projects such as this lead us to argue for expanded notions of impact which value the unexpected, contingent and non-linear outcomes and effects of engagements beyond (and yet also within) the academy. This strategy entails uncertainty and unpredictability, posing a challenge in current funding and institutional regimes of academic work (Cupples and Pawson, 2012; Hawkins et al., 2014). In light of recent critiques of dominant notions of academic impact (Pain et al., 2011; Rogers et al., 2014; Cook et al., 2014) we highlight the complex vectors of care across community spaces, professional practices and academic work which constitute diverse and often highly unpredictable spaces of ‘impact’.

We begin the paper by outlining our positionalities in the project before providing a broader conceptual framing. This connects relational geographies of care (Bowlby et al., 2010) to gendered geographies of caring in post-socialist Slovakia and focusses on ideas of the ethics of care (Hall and McCarroll, 2012) as a basis for integrating the process of collaboration into our overall analysis. We then narrate in detail the phases of the video project in Slovakia, discussing how foundations for (un)expected and organic forms of impact might be built utilising the lenses of the geographies of care and the ethics of care, before providing some wider reflections in the conclusion.

Our positionalities

Before introducing the theoretical context of the paper, we discuss our respective positionalities in the video project and in broader relationships and engagements that underpin our argument. The PV project itself took place in 2010 but we also include any later points of relevance.

³ We begin using ‘vector’ in its most common geometrical sense as a set of direction and length, highlighting the spatiality of care. The linear nature of vector, however, does not take away from the dynamism and organic non-linearity in which the project and its outcomes evolved, as we stress instead the *multiplicity* of connections and the profoundness of the effects various activities and relationships had. There is an analytical strength of the vector (as a singular noun) in emphasising the two-pronged intimacy of encounters between various actors, but throughout the paper, we refer rather to *vectors* (a plural) of care to emphasise the aggregate outcomes of often messy, intense, elusive and even conflicting events.

Petra, whose background is in counselling psychology, has been a youth worker in Kopčany since 2003, most of this time as a coordinator of Ulita, the local community organisation. She has the widest knowledge and contacts in the community among us, spanning all ages and social groups. Initially driven by her practitioner's agenda (providing a range of educational and counselling services focused on individual recipients), she progressively expanded the scope of her work towards community development and residents' involvement and participation. She has been running programmes for older young people (over 16) that challenge the thresholds of their involvement, including international youth exchanges, and she previously worked with Matej on another PV project that stimulated a transition of some young people from being service recipients towards becoming partners in community work (Blazek and Hraňová, 2012). She was involved in the initial phase of this video project (recruiting and training participants), supervised the activities and took the leading role in generating impact from the video on the neighbourhood. She had good contacts and relationships with the girls at the time of the project from her detached youth work activities.

Miroslava is an educational psychologist based at the Comenius University, Bratislava. At the time of the project she also coordinated programmes for younger children in Kopčany on a part-time basis with a focus on learning and school support. She had no prior experience with PV and she joined the project partly because she wanted to get more experience in working with older children. She co-facilitated the video-production with Matej and was involved to a lesser extent in the follow-up activities. She had little contact with this age group prior to the video project but this has since expanded.

Matej is a geographer/social researcher who completed his undergraduate geography degree in Bratislava before going to the UK for postgraduate study in 2006. He was in Kopčany in 2008/09 to do fieldwork with Ulita for his ESRC-supported PhD research at the University of Dundee (UK) involving an ethnography of children's practices with the 5–14 age-group. He became involved in other activities well beyond his research with a particular focus on the emerging agenda of community (rather than youth) work in the neighbourhood. He had no experience or training in PV before starting another project with Petra in 2009 but found the approach helpful in working at the interface of social research and community youth work. He had good contacts with both girls from his prior detached youth work activities linked to Ulita. When back in Slovakia in summer 2010 he became involved with the project which is the focus of this paper. He subsequently left Slovakia but stayed in contact with everyone involved. With Fiona, and in collaboration with Petra and Miroslava, he ran a small ESRC-funded knowledge exchange project in 2010–2011 that explored intersections of social research and community youth work and helped shape some of the ideas presented here.

Fiona supervised Matej's PhD and encouraged him to pursue avenues beyond the narrow focus of his research. She visited Kopčany once, a year before the video project took place, but was not involved directly in the PV project. She read and commented in detail on (tens of) thousands of words Matej wrote on his research, a majority of which never made it to the thesis, and her (academic and non-academic) interest in gender, youth and care helped shape the outputs of Matej's research and resulted in co-authored publications and the aforementioned knowledge exchange project.

We do not present these details simply as a way of documenting or legitimising our positions, though they may well function in that way, but to underline two points in relation to our overall argument. First, by highlighting our professional positionalities across the researcher–practitioner axis we wish to destabilise distinctions between them and to place the complementarity of our

backgrounds at the forefront of our discussions. We argue it is vital to decentre the primacy of academic (UK-based) researchers in the collaborative process. We recognise and name the professional practice of Petra and Miroslava as crucial to the ultimate production of “non-academic” impact⁴ in order to argue that such “non-academic” impact needs to be legitimised as an “academic” outcome. This is not to suggest that impacts in practice require academic legitimisation (though academic involvement can lend weight and legitimacy to aspects of practice in the eyes of funders or policy-makers, for example). Rather we argue for expanded, more differentiated notions of impact to be valued as legitimate within academic practice. Second, this account indicates some of the complex framings of the ethics of care which constitute the means in and through which the project developed and which provide the basis for its (un-)expected impacts.

Geographies of care, relationships of care, ethics of care

Geographies of care and post-socialism

Geographers have engaged with a range of topics related to care, two of which are of particular significance here. First, research emphasises the importance of young people as informal carers and their roles as economic, cultural and social agents in the context of families, communities and societies (Bartos, 2012). Whereas much of this literature focuses on the Majority World (Robson, 2004; Robson et al., 2006; Evans, 2011, 2012), our paper contributes to the limited literature on post-socialist childhood and youth (Hörschelmann and Schäfer, 2005; Blazek, 2011). Second, we contribute to the literature on care in the context of community and broader family networks, particularly with regard to economic and social exclusion (Parr and Philo, 2003; Bowlby, 2011; Bell and Rutherford, 2013). Here we highlight the significance and potential of wider engagements between young carers and their environments, but also between academics and other community-based actors addressing the needs of those whose livelihoods are entangled in these networks and practices.

Bowlby et al. (2010) argue that geopolitical, socio-economic and environmental contexts need to be considered in understanding experiences and practices of care. For us this principally means reflecting on the sharply neoliberal turn that social and economic reforms in Slovakia took in the middle of the 2000s (Stenning et al., 2010) and on the economic recession and austerity measures in Slovakia from around 2008 onwards which frame the events discussed here.

While parental leave after childbirth in Slovakia is generous, lasting three years, it is common especially among working class families and single-headed households for mothers to take at least part-time jobs (Inglot et al., 2012) or to rely on support from extended family networks (Stenning et al., 2010) to allow them to return to employment sooner. This support can be in the form of money or food, but childcare is very important. Stenning et al. (2010) highlight the difficulties for more vulnerable households if their extended family members live too far away and such arrangements frequently require children and young people to take on responsibilities for their younger siblings, but also for cousins, nieces and nephews, or other relatives while their parents and other adult relatives work. Sometimes wider informal networks of care are established between neighbours or friends from adjacent localities and children and young people also care for non-family members. Along with other patterns of care in post-socialist

⁴ On the other hand, Matej's and Fiona's roles were more prominent in producing this paper (and its possible academic impact). This further emphasises the non-linearity of collaboration and the complex production of impact.

Europe these informal systems of care are heavily gendered with expectations for caring placed predominantly on women and girls (Saxonberg and Szelewa, 2007; Plomien, 2009).

A second important factor is the transformation of the pre-school care system in Slovakia after the collapse of the previous regime in 1989. In urban areas pre-1989, and especially in Bratislava as the capital and largest city of Slovakia composed predominantly of pre-fabricated panel-block housing estates (Fig. 2), nurseries were usually located within walking distance and without the need to cross any busy road for all residents of such estates. They were usually able to offer places to all children. On the other hand, the provision, architecture and design of nurseries was standardised with little choice as places were allocated according to residence.

Transformations in the welfare system and declining birth rates mean numbers of public nurseries have fallen dramatically since 1989. In large housing estates, nursery buildings were converted to different uses and accessibility within walking distance is no longer universal. Provision of pre-school care and educational systems have been liberalised giving rise to a number of private nurseries and pre-school care sites that are usually out of reach for less affluent families such as many in Kopčany. Despite the emergence of private institutions, demand for nurseries exceeds provision. Public nurseries usually run a waiting list with preferences given to children whose siblings already attend, to pre-school children (i.e. one year before entering school) and to those living locally. During our research perceptions were also recorded that other factors, including assumptions about children and their families due to ethnicity (particularly Roma children – a large percentage of those in Kopčany) and levels of affluence, might also play a role albeit unofficially. Competition for places poses a challenge, especially for those families less knowledgeable about the welfare system and/or with lower incomes, resulting once again in greater reliance on the informal care arrangements described above.

Kopčany is a peripheral neighbourhood of Bratislava and part of the largest housing estate in Central Europe, Petržalka. Kopčany is isolated from the surrounding area by a motorway, railway, and a vast industrial zone while it almost borders Austria from the other side. The area has a long industrial history and was established in the 1970s primarily as a residential zone for temporary workers in the city until new housing policies by the city authorities in the 1990s relocated tenants from other parts of the city who did not or could not pay their rent to the neighbourhood. Combined with overall institutional neglect of the area this led to increased crime and deprivation. The authorities then turned one of the neighbourhood's five high-rise buildings into temporary social housing for families with young children and young people leaving foster care homes. As a result, at the time of our project in 2010, Kopčany had an unusually high proportion of children and young people, high levels of deprivation especially among families with children, a severe lack of local facilities and infrastructure for children and young people and a significant distance from the neighbourhood to other facilities. The Urita community centre, which established and facilitated our project, was the only ongoing provision in the neighbourhood. Based in a small flat on the ground floor of one of the tower blocks, it provides a range of services and activities for children, young people and their families, from centre-based activities to detached (street) youth work and community work. While not all these disadvantages necessarily applied to the two girls who produced the video, they were well aware of them and articulated them clearly during the project.

Relationships of care and gender

The context of care outlined above is instrumental for understanding the 'embeddedness of relationships' (Bowlby et al., 2010, p. 108) that constitute care. To comprehend these

relationships in more depth, Bowlby et al. (2010) highlight the distinction between *caring for* and *caring about* someone, two terms which signify the differences and the connections between care as a feeling and as a tangible interaction. While we acknowledge and recognise such distinctions – and the terms cannot be even translated into Slovak as the same verb – here we integrate the two into a single framework with the focus placed on the interplay between material practices and emotional experiences of care.

Bowlby et al. (2010) further emphasise that care is not just a consequence of particular social relationships but that it also constitutes them. Experiences of care spring from reciprocity and interdependence between carers and recipients of care and from both oppressive and liberating qualities of care relationships. We follow this angle closely by looking not just at the relationships between the young carers and the children they care for, but also at the dynamics between the girls themselves and between them and others involved in the project, both locally and trans-locally. Considering the non-linear dynamics of care across various scales helps us illuminate the diversity of potential outcomes from such engagements.

Of particular importance to these relationships is the dimension of gender, discussed here in two ways. The first is the gendered division of children's care duties and its impact on the emerging individual and collective identities and agencies of young people, their families and communities. This is geographically and culturally situated (Katz, 2004; Evans and Becker, 2009) and we follow the argument that while children's gender identities are often shaped through social relationships that embed care, these relationships are themselves affected by specific situated expressions of wider socio-economic conditions (see Blazek, 2011 and Hörschelmann and van Hoven, 2003 on the post-socialist context specifically). Whereas our previous work on children's gender identities in this context (Blazek, 2011) pays only a passing attention to care itself, this paper highlights and explores the importance of care in the lives of some girls and makes additional points about contrasts with experiences among their male peers.

Gender also emerges as important in the work of frontline practitioners aiming to support young people through community youth work. Drawing on the feminist political philosophy of Tronto (1993) we focus on four elements of the practitioners' engagement: 'attentiveness' to the girls' experiences and their social location as carers; embracing 'responsibility' towards the girls within the role of community youth workers; negotiation and development of a wider 'competence' that fosters mutual relationships; and negotiation of these relationships through lived experiences of care and engagement (formulated by Tronto as 'responsiveness' to care). The project narrative (Section 'The story: a critical narrative of the PV project') explains how the whole initiative was triggered by recognition of broader gender-specific power asymmetries in certain aspects of young people's lives in the neighbourhood and by the professional agenda of empowerment through youth work and informal education which focused on girls' experiences of marginalisation.

Ethics of care and expanding conceptions of impact

In Tronto's account, the four components mentioned above frame an ethics of care, a moral attitude to transfer values and experiences of care and caring into wider social relations. The idea of ethics of care is not new to geographers and we draw on it to conceptualise the relationships that the video project exposed or developed, both in the immediate but also in the wider sense. By doing so we reflect on the relative position of research alongside other forms of engagement, including community and family relations, youth and community work, and intersectional networks

across and beyond academia. An ethics of care serves as a foundational conceptual framework for integrating this range of connections into an interpretative narrative of our story (in particular) and a vision of impactful geographies beyond pre-scripted research work (more generally).

Ansell (2008) promotes an ethics of care in engagement with young people as a response to how commonly institutions reduce them to the future workforce. We extend this to research and its intersections with other forms of engagement, examining the often complex power relations and intimate connectivity between researchers and participants that provide a basis for an ethics of care (McDowell, 2005). Hall and McGarrol (2012) demonstrate care is a bi-directional dynamic inscribed by patterns of interdependency. We argue such constellations are also intrinsic to relations in research and practitioner work, as is demonstrated by other reflections on collaborative modes of research and the wider (and closer) networks that frame such activities (Nagar and Geiger, 2007; Nagar, 2013). Thus we highlight how, in the context of the PV project, meeting our individual and collective agendas (in research, youth and community work) required involvement of the girls as much as they in turn drew on the support from adult professionals in their venture of improving conditions for the younger children in the neighbourhood for whom they cared. Hall (2011) argues that active citizenship evolves through interdependency rather than through the establishment of autonomous subjects. This is particularly relevant in the context of the relational geographies of age and growing-up among the girls from the project (Hopkins and Pain, 2007; Horton and Kraftl, 2008). As Jones (2013) and Kesby (2007) show, children need to be seen as subjects with inherent agency and a certain level of spatial autonomy, but it does not take away from their need for love, safety and, ultimately, care. This is relevant in understanding the girls' activities, seeing them both as carers in the neighbourhood and as subjects in engagements with practitioners and wider networks of research praxis.

Given our multiple positionalities, attending to the geographies of our engagement and the spatialities of the ethics of care in our reflections is crucial. We emphasise that although the empirical focus of the video project was located in a single neighbourhood, the topography of care spans well beyond this locale. Several writers (Smith, 2005; Till, 2012; Hall and McGarrol, 2012) have emphasised the importance of place for the emergence of practices of care and that care may be significant in the constitution of a locality. However, as Mason and Whitehead (2012) demonstrate, there are also possibilities for 'ethics of care-at-distance', for a multitude of connections, emotional, organisational and material, with potential for transformative change through engagement across places and positions. Our paper therefore explores the geographical location not only of our everyday work, but also of interests and knowledges, alongside intersecting nodes of interdependency and reciprocity (Taylor, 2014) in our personal and professional agendas. Instead of localising our activities, we follow a mobile geography of care, localised and re-located, enlivened and enriched through intersections of aspects including 'embodiment, agency, passivity, vulnerability, emotion, praxis and care' (Dixon and Marston, 2011, p.445) which incorporate the unexpected and the contingent in notions of impact. In this way we directly expand on conversations initiated by Pain et al. (2011) who call for impact to be acknowledged as a two-way processual element emerging at a range of scales, by analysing in detail the formation of various modes of impact.

The next section narrates an account of the project in three parts, followed by a reflexive consideration of the vectors of care and formations of impact across the range of processes and connections.

The story: a critical narrative of the PV project

Rationale and initiation of the project: bridging age and gender gaps in community youth work

Some roots of the PV project lie in 2008 and 2009 when Matej joined Ulita as a youth worker in relation to his PhD fieldwork (though we could identify other 'origins' too). During this time and alongside his research work with younger children, Matej joined Petra in work with a group of 17–20 year old young people from the neighbourhood centred on attending international youth exchanges and related activities in Kopčany. They used PV in a long-term project that entailed research, community development, informal education and therapeutic components, focusing on young people's individual development as well as their increased involvement in community affairs (Blazek and Hraňová, 2012). Notable at the time was the absence of older girls (over 15) from the activities of Ulita and the difficulties of involving them, but also their increased absence in comparison to boys from public space activities and visible peer networks in the neighbourhood. Along with other factors (peer relationships and partners outside the neighbourhood, efforts to distance themselves from the neighbourhood), commitments to support their families through caring roles were highly prominent reasons for these absences (Blazek, 2011).

In summer 2010 Matej had finished his doctoral fieldwork but was still involved in community activities that went beyond the original research. One idea which emerged was to develop an activity for older children (aged 12–14) as Ulita's indoor space was closed for the summer, and whereas other age groups had their own programmes at this point, only detached youth work and occasional community events were available for children of this age. This activity was intended as a first step to stir the children to develop into a new "17–20" group, shifting their relationship with Ulita from "clients", i.e. recipients of the services, towards a greater level of partnership. The activity thus was not supposed to be 'open-to-all', as was the rule with most regular Ulita activities, but rather to be selective to the extent that children would have to respond to increased expectations and requirements (such as on commitment or regular participation), different modes of involvement and take more responsibility.

There was also an explicit objective of recruiting girls as a core of the group. Age 14–15 was usually when girls' regular contact with Ulita waned and when they tended to disappear from Kopčany's public spaces. The previous 17–20 group was rather male-dominated (Blazek and Hraňová, 2012) and there was a strong intention to increase girls' involvement. At the same time, we found girls in the neighbourhood more "mature" – not in terms of biological age but as an empirical reflection of the commitments and responsibilities they carried, unlike their male peers who had more time and resources for their own interests – and therefore perhaps better suited to manage the increased challenges of the summer activity.

Following the experience from the "17–20" project, we decided to use PV and hoped it would be attractive to the young people, accessible, developing (and developing from) group dynamics, providing an opportunity for individual young people to be involved in diverse ways reflecting their talents, interests or mutual relationships, and giving us a reasonable time-frame to start the project early in the summer with a vision of completing the actual video by the end of August. This would potentially lead to long-term work with the new group in the autumn (Blazek and Hraňová, 2012).

Video production: bringing care and caring to the field

We approached 7–8 children, offering them participation in a one-day training event, followed by facilitated video production

over which they would have total control, from the choice of topic, through content, to dissemination. In the end only three came to the initial training. This was not uncommon; children in the neighbourhood often forgot about events, the training was additionally situated away from the neighbourhood and it started early in the morning, while children usually slept late during their holiday. Even small issues like the time and place of the training raised the thresholds of children's participation and made the video project somehow less "inclusive" than Ulita's usual mode of working. But it also signalled that there was not as much interest at that time. Two girls and a boy completed the training, facilitated by Matej, Petra and Miroslava, and the day itself was successful: after initial shyness and hesitancy, the children spent the day together, learned the basics of working with the camera, developed a story, and produced a brief video about the day. They agreed to meet again in the neighbourhood and work on a more substantive project. The training was one of the first times they undertook activities away from the neighbourhood and their first experience with activities from Ulita that placed emphasis on their own perspectives.

Two weeks later, another girl came to the planning meeting, making a group of four. The group decided they would like to produce a video about their activities in the neighbourhood and brainstormed themes that should be included. The list was extensive, rather than thought through in depth, including everyday activities such as playing outside, doing sport, going to a lake nearby, or walking a dog. The video was primarily meant to be fun, first and foremost. However, some more serious reflections emerged, almost exclusively from the girls, especially about the time spent caring for younger relatives and how this was a very important feature of their life in the neighbourhood.

A few days later only two girls, Hana and Elena, came to the actual shooting facilitated by Matej and Miroslava (the other girl was away and the boy was not allowed to come for some reason). Deciding to proceed, the girls revised the original script and immediately identified caring for younger children as the main theme of *their* everyday lives and as the topic to begin with. Initially they wanted to produce parts of the video about more leisure-related themes too, but once they started actual field production with young children in the neighbourhood, they decided to focus only on that and developed a new script that would cover the following topics:

- Introduction of the video and themselves.
- Presence of younger children in Kopčany.
- Lack of facilities such as playgrounds or benches.
- Opportunistic use of public space, often dangerous and including activities that disturb neighbours.
- Appreciation of Ulita (about which we were hesitant. The girls presented a lot of positive feedback that we found honest, but we had no interest in the video becoming an ode to the community centre) along with recognition that Ulita is not enough: not enough contact time, activities generally only for children aged 6 and more, indoor premises that were too small.
- There are people who care about Kopčany and want a change: examples of positive action to challenge the area's predominantly negative image.
- Suggestions for change: "What would we like to change here?".

During the day of filming, Elena was responsible for her younger cousin and Hana later also took charge of her family's friends' young son (both children were aged 3–4). On the one hand, the girls took advantage of this and involved both children as protagonists in the video (see Fig. 1). On the other hand, Matej and Miroslava had to entertain them at times so the girls could do their work. As a result, we experienced something of the girls' everyday positions as carers: we "had fun" but yet we had to integrate our (albeit temporary) caring duties into this as the girls did on a daily basis.

The video production was impressively effective. From the beginning, the girls wanted to produce footage with younger kids, playing and acting in their everyday environment. Elena's young cousin was the main protagonist, but they wanted more children. The girls took a brief stroll around and asked a few mothers (and other carers, almost all of them female) to "loan" them their children for the video. In the end, five young children were assembled with (verbal) consent from their guardians, some of whom observed the process from a distance while others took the opportunity for a brief moment of tranquillity with their children taken care of.

We found this moment very illuminative of the networks and bonds among local carers. All the guardians were adults, some were ages with girls' parents, but the girls found it easy to negotiate the situation because of their shared positionality and experiences as carers. Hana and Elena explained to the adults they were shooting



Fig. 1. Kopčany: neighbourhood needs a playground.



Fig. 2. Urban landscape of Kopčany.

the video not for fun but to “show how children have nowhere to play and what can be changed about it”. This was a sudden shift from the original purpose and one which they came up with on their own, surprising even Matej and Miroslava, and indicating how motivations to engage with PV may shift and develop over time (Mistry et al., 2014). At this point there was no discussion about how to use the video yet (who should see it, etc.), but the process had already integrated a critical reflection and creative process with the initial focus on fun, all underpinned by some serious emotional dynamics as the girls articulated and materialised their concerns, frustrations but also hopes and sentiments of attachment about their experiences as carers. For the girls, this was also an opportunity to reflect and share their experiences of caring with someone other than their closest friends and maybe occasionally their family members or other carers. Caring was a regular duty for them but over the day of filming the fact that they were engaged in caring for younger children while filming about this issue meant that this came even more sharply into focus as Matej and Miroslava being drawn into these processes encouraged the girls to talk with them about these experiences.

The previous PV project (with the “17–20” age group) was marked by tensions, clashes, participants sticking to their individual ideas and often painful processes in reaching a consensus (Blazek and Hraňová, 2012). Working with Hana and Elena was different. The girls needed only one day in the field (the older group worked for months) and despite not being overly close friends before the project started, they created a dynamic atmosphere of collaboration and mutual support. This experience did not evolve into any deeper friendship, and the girls lost almost all contact with each other some months after the project. We therefore assert that it was not the friendship itself – even though it was important – but rather their common interest and shared social positionality along with new experiences of sharing and expressing these in a safe and encouraging environment that prompted and boosted their synergy.

The next meeting took place one week later. Matej edited the video following Hana and Elena’s script. The girls suggested a few changes and then wrote and recorded their voiceover parts. This was also revealing. In the older group, the young people were generally unwilling to speak and preferred to express their views through image and music, using private symbolisms, cultural associations and affective (rather than cognitive) instruments, many of which were incomprehensible to a general audience. Hana and Elena were on the contrary convinced that there *should be* voice in the video. They were shy and embarrassed while practising and recording in front of each other and hearing their voices from the playback. However, the motivation to complete the video was strong enough to record their spoken parts.

We saw the use of recording tools as a very effective mid-point between refusing to speak (as with the older group – they had a message to say but felt uncertain about saying it) and speaking live in public. The video created a safer space in which the girls had time, space, support and guidance, including facilitation and practical suggestions, such as how to shorten long sentences, how to breathe and how to improve their articulation. As importantly, they had the realistic and comprehensible aim of producing a video, rather than more distant goals such as negotiating directly with policy-makers.

During the voiceover/final-editing day, the girls were again responsible for their young relatives. Elena’s cousin was especially challenging; while she enjoyed the work outside where she was used to playing on her own (and was a “star” of the video), she required lots of company and attention indoors. The community centre itself is a small flat with an office and two small rooms for children and their activities. It meant that either Miroslava or Matej had to be with her most of the time and had to “discipline” her, for instance when we needed total silence during recording. Over the day, Elena had a few outbursts of anger and fury at her cousin, some of which we found rather cruel and/or (normally) unacceptable. This was an important reflection that whilst the girls bore enormous responsibility on a daily basis and showed some great reflexivity and creativity in thinking about the topic, they were still “ordinary” young teenage girls with little guidance or education in childcare, and we were reminded how many of their peers would have probably found such a role very challenging.

Aftermath: from fun through recognition and appreciation to “participation”

Thus far we have outlined a range of the relations involved, highlighting the role of Elena and Hana as well as the adults and other child participants. Applying a narrow definition to the project’s impact to this point, one might argue that it was limited since “only” two girls were directly engaged in making the film. However, we argue for the need to employ wider notions of impact to encompass shifting motivations among participants, (un)expected outcomes and questions about how impact can and should be understood.

On the evening after we finished the video, the 17–20 group organised a community cinema screening in a nearby pedestrian underpass.⁵ Before the main film was screened, we negotiated that

⁵ This again reinforces the wider absence of community facilities in the neighbourhood.

the girls could show their video. Hana and Elena, very enthusiastic and nervous at the same time, swiftly secured (spoken) consent from the parents of all the children appearing in the video and the screening was advertised in the neighbourhood. Many children and parents were present and there was an overall appreciation and praise for the girls for their video as well as approval for its message (“You’re right, you said it as it is!”). The girls later collected written consent from the parents so they could post the video online. Far from having any concerns about child safety (see its centrality especially in UK discussions about engagement with young people: Pain, 2006; Alderson and Morrow, 2011), most parents expressed support for the video’s message and pride about their children being represented. This might be in part due to the relative novelty of video as an accessible technology in 2010, but it may also relate to different cultures around perceptions of safety and panic, as well as different models of child protection between countries (Gilbert et al., 2011; Grietens, 2013). During the fieldwork and especially at a series of follow-up meetings after the production, the girls were enthusiastic about how the video could be used to fund a new playground in Kopčany. They came up with perhaps naive suggestions (which reflected their eagerness) to burn the video on a CD and sell in the streets or to organise a wider screening in a city cinema. Importantly, they were thinking about exploiting the video for a community development initiative *before* this idea sprang up among the adult staff.

A couple of months after the video was placed on youtube and circulated in the community, municipal elections were taking place. Several candidates visited Kopčany (otherwise at the margins of politicians’ interest) and several even endorsed the message in the video, for instance on their Facebook campaign pages. Petra decided to seize the opportunity to capitalise on the timing of the municipal election, while simultaneously stimulating involvement of local residents in influencing community affairs. Hana and Elena, normally very vocal, at first refused the idea of articulating what they said in the video to someone official. Petra then used the video in her communication with the local council on her own, but she also organised a meeting with council representatives where the girls came (along with other community members) but where they did not have to speak much as the video was largely self-explanatory. Nevertheless, the girls’ embodied presence at the meeting

amplified their message while they found this much easier than being spokespersons for the neighbourhood. For them and others at the meeting being involved in community action was a rather new experience as there was little tradition of this locally.

Petra afterwards ran successful (though often painful) negotiations with the local council and the first new playground in more than 20 years was built in Kopčany. The new mayor came to open it in front of local television and a big commercially-sponsored event took place. Three years later, the playground was still in use and undamaged (Fig. 3) with a good number of local residents meeting there and taking care of it. The video was important in promoting the needs of the neighbourhood, as was the determination of the girls to take part in the “negotiations” and to encourage others. The story behind the video and how this could be presented to local officials was also important in this, including how the girls collected signed agreements to release the video online (a very challenging issue normally and a sign of parents’ strong motivations) or the effectiveness of the production.

Reflections: vectors of care and diverse (un)expected impacts

In this final section of the narrative we explore some of the vectors of care and caring entailed in the project as they were transformed through engagements at various scales into diverse forms of impact. The most obvious manifestation of *care* was in Hana’s and Elena’s own everyday experiences as carers, but through the story other vectors of care in the neighbourhood become apparent: guardians of children who appeared in the video or those adults who attended the screening and supported the video’s message. There is also evidence of people caring about young children by caring for the environment: a testimony in the video about “mothers clearing sites where their children play” or residents taking responsibility for the new playground. All these patterns remain downplayed and overlooked in the social, housing and urban policy of Bratislava and all entail dynamics of support and formations of new social relationships (among the carers) but also of carers’ potential marginalisation because of restrictions on their personal agency.

Care was also a core pillar and defining principle of the youth work praxis of Ulita. Care, as in Tronto’s matrix of attentiveness



Fig. 3. Snapshot of the new playground.

(to young people's needs), responsibility (for developing provisions responding to those needs in a professional way), competence (to provide care in such a manner) and responsiveness (from the young people in the neighbourhood), drove the agenda of their programme of work with young people and of this particular project motivated by recognition of the gendered organisation of childcare among young people in Kopčany. It also influenced the choice of PV as the method because of prior experience. Matej and Miroslava became involved in activities that had seemingly nothing to do with the video but manifested the elements of care that inspired and guided our work with Hana and Elena: we entertained the girls' young relatives and we met both Hana and Elena once or twice a week to help them with their school preparation. Both girls had to take reassessments at the end of the summer to progress to the next school year and their guardians required them to spend time revising (in addition to their caring duties); in this way they agreed to the girls taking part in the video project as they would also receive help with school.

Care was also the binding element between research and youth/community work. Matej did his ethnographic research in 2008–2009 in the role of youth worker and so he had to adopt the practitioners' frame of conduct, prioritising young people's interests and provision of service over research-driven generation of knowledge. In turn, rather than sharply separating distinct modes of knowledge production and praxis (Bondi, 2003), his involvement in the neighbourhood spanned across both professional areas of research and practice and often blended within the framework of community work (see Blazek and Lemešová, 2011; Blazek, 2013). The work with Hana and Elena began as a youth work activity informed by research expertise (community-based PV). Then, using Tronto's terms, 'attending' to girls' experiences as carers, taking 'responsibility' as youth workers, equipped with professional 'competencies' of youth workers and researchers, and establishing a 'responsive' relationship with the girls, the project evolved into a piece of collaborative praxis and production of knowledge about young children's and their carers' realities that was used as evidence in negotiations with local policy makers.

Not least, it was the ethics-of-care-at-distance element of the project's composition that enabled the whole process. Fiona's approach to supervision supported Matej's wider activities rather than preventing him from doing something not necessarily relevant for his thesis. She encouraged him to explore potential legacies – and impacts – of the research in the neighbourhood that might bear less weight in the mode of academic production that typically dictates PhD success. Community events rather than/as well as peer-reviewed journal papers were generated as outcomes (see Fuller and Askins, 2007). Along with academic research, including the availability of formal research funding, care embedded in pedagogic praxis was entangled in the relations and processes that made the project and its impacts possible (Turner, 2014). This point is important especially in the context of the changing landscape of higher education in the UK and elsewhere which, in parallel with the understanding of impact we critique in this paper, increasingly requires postgraduate students to attend to their future employability by focusing on short-term goals and emphasising the need to publish in a relatively short timeframe, rather than recognising and making provision for the organic nature of research.

The complex matrix of the vectors of care helped generate a range of impacts, most of them unanticipated when viewed from the outset of the project though the possibility for a range of outcomes was embedded as some level in the ethics of care deployed. Our main intended outcome was to engage with older children and run an activity that would be a first step in long-term work focused on their individual development but also involvement in the community (in simpler terms, we wanted them to have fun while doing

something educational). We felt we achieved this even though only with two young people as opposed to the (slightly) larger group originally aimed for. Still we do not wish to idealise this impact. In the year after the video project, we sought to involve the girls in other initiatives that largely failed. Individually, Elena and Hana subsequently took different directions. Whilst both maintain exceptionally good relations with Ulita, Hana distanced herself from the neighbourhood over the following years. She even preferred taking her young brother to playgrounds away from the neighbourhood rather than use the new one next to her building which she helped to get built. Elena was active afterwards and became an important "mediator" between Ulita and the community before moving away from the neighbourhood but still maintaining some contact. Neither expressed any further interest in video as a technology even though they reflected very positively on their experience, somewhat confirming that while participants may value its outcomes, interest in PV is more typically driven by researchers and 'professionals' in such contexts (Mistry et al., 2014).

However, there were other unintended and unexpected developments not anticipated at the outset. Construction of the playground and its importance for the local community is the most tangible example. Experience of the project invigorated some more activities in the community, established community development agendas more firmly within the work of Ulita, developed contact between Ulita and the municipality and encouraged other local residents to take part in initiatives on their own. By 2014, a new larger sports ground for everyone (mentioned in the last sentence of Hana's and Elena's video) was under development, planned, promoted and built with considerable involvement from the community. When Matej visited in 2014 he found young people from the neighbourhood, whom he remembered as often challenging, actively contributing to the creation of community events. The video was by no means the only moment of this development, but it was important in being among the first activities involving local (young) residents in taking responsibility for shaping their community, and especially important because of the tangibility and reach of its results.

There were other impacts beyond the neighbourhood. Reciprocal transfer of skills and knowledge between Matej and his Ulita colleagues helped shape their respective professional activities and resulted in further collaborations across their respective professional fields (an ESRC-funded knowledge exchange project involving practitioners, policy-makers and academics in Slovakia and the UK; EU-funded international training courses for young people from marginalised backgrounds on work in their communities). Apart from professional positionalities, geography mattered too; PV, research, and their role in community work were little known in Slovakia at the time. On the other hand, the institutional and social context of Ulita enabled Matej to do an organic piece of ethnography research that could be much more difficult in a UK context (given issues around young children's presence in public space and the regulatory practices of the child protection system) thereby helping generate his academic outputs, and ultimately connecting a circle between academia and community youth work, a circle that is yet very "leaky" as outcomes escape or exceed their/our intentions.

Conclusions

What began as a minor youth work project evolved into a significant contribution to the development of a local community and produced rich research materials used in academic writings as well as by the community organisation (otherwise underfunded for research and evidence-generating activities). Mills (2013) recently highlighted the importance of the 'fluidity between

research [...]and everyday life' (p. 16) in the production of 'public geographies' and especially the often 'unexpected' outcomes of research engagements. This paper develops this notion by emphasising the importance of how the platforms for such engagement are set up and by strategically problematising the idea of (un)expected outcomes and their differentiation from 'unplanned' outcomes as there was the expectation of outcomes, yet there was recognition of the openness as to what those impacts might be.

The vectors of care and other relational dynamics that evolved through engagements between young carers from Slovakia, their community, local practitioners, academics from the UK and others in turn initiated a variety of impacts, ranging from tangible developments in the neighbourhood through social relationships to academic production of knowledge. These impacts were triggered by an ethics of care, manifested as an amalgamation of 'attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness' (Tronto, 1993) by various (local and distant, non-academic and academic) actors in the context of the lives of young female carers in Kopčany, rather than by a meticulously pre-scripted plan of work.

In that sense, then, we contribute to debates on impact by demonstrating that while not all impacts can be *planned* in advance, an ethics of care embedded in relationships within and beyond research may form social conditions in which outcomes exceeding the initial expectations *can be anticipated*. We (and the girls) contributed to the organically evolving project with our distinctive positionalities, agendas and competences, but rather than producing disconnections, they transformed into complementary assets that shaped the ultimate outcomes, far beyond any initial expectations. The paper followed geographies of an ethics of care as they materialised in and through a range of processes and highlighted the importance of de-locating the understanding of impact production beyond a linear "academics-to-users-through-policy" trajectory, stressing instead interconnectivities and interdependencies in the fluid interfaces between researchers and others.

In the broadest sense, our argument articulates a critique of established notions of impact that prioritise certain scales (large), effects (one-way linear), temporalities (short-term) and beneficiaries (privileged, powerful, especially policy-makers) in evaluations and esteem indicators. We conceptualise ethics of care as messy and organic dynamics that give rise to multiple complex outcomes entangled in complicated ways and resisting straightforward auditability. We suggest conceiving of research from the beginning as "more-than-research", questioning and blurring lines between academic and non-academic outcomes, and mapping rather than prescribing the tangible and intangible importance of research practices, engagements and achievements. If institutional strategies are now accommodating impact as a set of pre-defined "tick box" objectives, driven more by neoliberal policies of auditability than the organic nature of research, we wish to counter this push. Instead we highlight care, collaboration, reciprocity, interdependency and positional transgression as legitimate resources for producing impact embedded in ongoing processes of engagement within and beyond academia, and we suggest considering such resources as valid criteria for institutional evaluation of the value of research.

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Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.02.017>.

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